

Art Reviews

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like surface, slim-framed "windows" open otherwise impenetrable grounds onto other grounds. Sometimes these spaces open onto still other spaces, suggesting that behind every image is another image.

Elsewhere, cartoon clouds float in a smoky atmosphere in the background, suggesting that painting is a high-wire act with no safety net.

These illusory openings recall the software that allows you to run many programs at once, as well as the streamlined windows on 1950s passenger trains and the idea, initiated by one-point perspective, that Renaissance paintings were metaphorical windows onto other worlds. Imagine running a half-dozen programs simultaneously on a gigantic monitor, and you'll have an idea of the spatial complexity of Argent's paintings.

One of the most curious aspects of his sleekly designed images is that words do not stick to them. Indebted to the poker-faced silence of Edward Ruscha's enigmatic pictures and the graphic flamboyance of Lari Pittman's narrative emblems, Argent's seemingly Teflon-coated paintings do not stun a viewer into speechlessness as much as they leave one tongue-tied—agitated, engaged and anything but numb.

• *Post Gallery, 6130 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 932-1822, through May 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

Flowers on a Fuse: L.C. Armstrong's dazzling canvases at Angles Gallery marry the quiet beauty of freshly cut flowers to the spectacular drama of eye-popping, ear-splitting fireworks displays. Each of the New York-based artist's approximately 4-by-3-foot panels has the density and impact of three separate paintings that appear to have been stacked atop one another and mysteriously fused into a single, head-spinning image.

Sealed under a thick layer of translucent resin, the backdrops



Angles Gallery

Larger-than-life blooms in "Moon Under Phalaenopsis" by L.C. Armstrong.

are dreamy scenes that seem to be the descendants of grand 19th-century landscapes. Often rendered in a subdued palette of moonlight grays, smoky blues, muted pinks and faded yellows, these ethereal vistas at dusk and sunrise include mountain lakes, paired volcanoes and low-lying cloud banks.

The middle grounds consist of twisting lines Armstrong made by igniting thick string fuses that she pressed against the resin. As the fuses burned, they burnished dark, fiery marks into the paintings.

These spidery lines serve as the

stems of the brilliantly colored flowers that leap into the foreground. Enormous orchids, resplendent sunflowers, lush lady-slippers and velvety hibiscus—along with an imaginary blossom or two—have been laid out across the picture plane so that not a single petal overlaps with another. So deliberate is their arrangement that the paintings recall formal portraiture.

Like hybrid offspring that are bigger and better than their sources, Armstrong's exquisite pictures of towering flowers evoke a world gone out of control. But un-

like most science-fiction stories about mutation, her works do not tell cautionary tales about the virtues of balance and the benefits of moderation.

Instead, they endorse excess. Sharing less with Alexis Rockman's mutant morality tales and more with Sharon Ellis' celebrations of artifice, Armstrong's giddy images demonstrate that, when it comes to art, there's no such thing as too much of a good thing.

• *Angles Gallery, 2222 and 2230 Main St., Santa Monica, (310) 396-5019, through Saturday.*

Small World: Nolina Burge's tiny landscapes at Dirt Gallery have a lot going for them. Handsomely painted in a naturalistic manner, their saturated palettes include a rich range of blues, greens, grays and smog-tinted yellows. Depicting clear or cloudy skies above clusters of dimly or darkly silhouetted trees, these tasteful paintings represent safe escapes from the mean streets of the urban sprawl just outside their framing edges.

Unfortunately, the young artist's pleasant pictures lack ambition. Making very few demands on viewers, these square images, which measure only 3, 4 or 5 inches on a side, pale in comparison to the more elaborately crafted miniatures they recall. If Burge's works were bigger, they wouldn't be so cute, and their considerable charm might not wear thin so quickly.

• *Dirt Gallery, 7906 Santa Monica Blvd., #218, (323) 822-9359, through May 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

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